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SUBJECT: CHAD: MEETING WITH AHMED DIRAIJ

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) leader Ahmed Diraij shared his impressions of diplomatic moves and countermoves by Chad, Sudan and Eritrea relative to the Darfur conflict with the Ambassador March 21. He expected continuing jockeying for position in the week ahead among rebel leaders Adam Bakheit, Sharif Hariri and Abdul Shafi. If all went according to plan, Chad President Idriss Deby would meet shortly with Sudan rebels in Abeche and the SLM would declare its new leadership. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) leader Ahmed Diraij met with the Ambassador March 21 for a tour d'horizon of Diraij's political career as an advocate for the Darfur region and his thoughts on the current leadership impasse among rebel groups. Although Diraij emphasized that his movement did not advocate taking up arms to resolve the Darfur crisis, he counted himself among those which emphatically rejected the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). According to Diraij, the DPA was flawed because it did not end the marginalization of the Darfur region; it had certainly not created the conditions which would allow the over three million Sudanese IDPs in Sudan, and over 200,000 Sudanese refugees in Chad to return to their homes. Diraij stated that DPA had foundered because the agreement reached in Abuja was not consistent with the Declaration of Principles. He argued for returning to the agenda that had been agreed upon by the Government of Chad and the rebels. Ultimately, the test of the success of any agreement would be the return of Sudanese refugees and IDPs to their homes.

¶3. (SBU) Turning to the current diplomatic moves between Chad, Sudan and Eritrea, Diraij welcomed the fact that the international community now recognized that work was needed to bring negotiators back to the table. The Eritreans had been given the nod by the Government of Sudan to mediate. (He commented that, for their part, the Eritreans were keen to improve their relations with the Government of Sudan, which was harboring Eritrean opposition movements). The Eritreans had realized that they needed to bring Chad on board because of the movement's connections with Chad. Concerning Libya's role, the Tripoli meeting had been designed to first convince President Deby, then the rebel movements, and then to kick off the mediation

¶4. (SBU) Diraij said that the Sudanese rebels under the National Redemption Front (NRF) remain united, but there are internal divisions inside the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM). Diraij said he was comfortable with the mission and the declaration of principles of the NRF. But agreements must be made to determine leadership and decide on a common message for a strong negotiating position. To strengthen the position of the NRF, Diraij asked for USG and international assistance for communications support, such as radios and newspapers. Sudanese rebel groups will wield more influence

and a better bargaining position, Diraij said, if they had more military muscle. He added, &If you want peace, prepare for war.8

15. (SBU) Diraij repeatedly emphasized the importance of the movements finding a common stand. He stated that in his meetings with Government of National Unity (GNU) Vice President Salva Kiir in N,djamena, the latter had stressed to him the importance of unity. The movements &trust him,8 Diraij stated. He said the SLM was currently in the field working on leadership issues. Field commanders were to organize and decide on a new leader) most likely Abdel Shafi. But it turned out that there was a larger contest for the SLM's leadership) it could in fact be that either Adam Bakheit, or Sharif Hariri could come out on top. A meeting was projected for later in the week in Abeche and President Deby would be present. In addition, Diraij informed the Ambassador of plans for a conference for Darfur leaders in the southern provincial capital of Juba (in question is the conference attendees and date, see reftel). In addition, Eritrea wanted to bring the movements to Asmara for a meeting with EU negotiator Pekka Haavisto.

16. (SBU) Diraij commented that Justice and Equality Leader Khalil Ibrahim was a &difficult8 person, and was embarrassing the Chadians by moving around Chad with large numbers of armed troops. According to Diraij, Khalil Ibrahim did not agree to meet with Salva Kiir.

17. (SBU) In conclusion, Diraij commented that Libya, Chad and Eritrea all had interests in the Darfur crisis, but at the same time, all wanted peace. He commented that if these countries could be manipulated in the right way, peace would return - and - more importantly for the livelihoods of those

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in Darfur and in countries bordering Sudan (in particular, Eritrea), trade would be reestablished.

Comment

18. (SBU) Diraij's day to day involvement in the leadership struggles of the leading rebel movements is not clear. He stated himself that he would like to be the "Nelson Mandela" of Darfur and had no leadership ambitions other than to assist Darfur escape its impoverished and marginalized state.

19. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
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